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ABSTRACT

This study suggests that the position of department chairman can be viewed from two perspectives: the roles required of the position and the preparation of faculty for these roles. A taxonomy of the major roles of chairmen was provided. Investigation of chairmen's activities in their academic, administrative, and leadership roles permits a better understanding of the duties performed, the amount of time required, and the satisfaction or lack of it derived by chairmen. The 1,198 respondents to the questionnaire indicate that they feel most comfortable in the academic role, although frustration occurs because of competing demands on their time by administrative and leadership functions they are required to fulfill. Although they state that they derive the least enjoyment from the administrative role, they recognize the importance of the activities associated with it. The leadership role incorporates both positive and negative aspects, but, in general, the department chairmen surveyed felt it is an important responsibility from which they derive satisfaction if not pleasure. Chairmen express interest in obtaining more information on management techniques. Orientation sessions with attention to local procedures, leadership techniques, and management procedures appear wanted and needed. In this area, higher education needs to internalize the same philosophies of improvement from learning that it continually exports to the remainder of our culture. (Author)

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A ROLE ANALYSIS OF DEPARTMENT CHAIRMEN AT STATE UNIVERSITIES

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SUMMARY

This study suggests that the position of department chairman can be viewed from two perspectives: the roles required of the position and the preparation of faculty for these roles. A taxonomy of the major roles of chairmen was provided. Investigation of chairmen's activities in their academic, administrative, and leadership roles permits a better understanding of the duties performed, the amount of time required, and the satisfaction or lack of it derived by chairmen.

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INTRODUCTION

Department chairmen occupy a pivotal role in the administrative processes of institutions of higher learning. They stand in the uncomfortable area between an educational system continually under pressure for efficient management and a learning environment whose members search for meaning and relevance and desire greater freedom and flexibility. Yet, there is little available knowledge of the actual roles and duties which chairmen perform in this pivotal position. The present confusion about chairmen was noted by Dressel et al. (1970:84) who reported that their evidence on the influence of chairmen was ambiguous and not easily explained and "that the position of the department chairmen is vague, often misunderstood, and not clearly perceived." This study sought to identify the major roles which chairmen perform and to determine the degree to which (1) perceived departmental goals, (2) selected dimensions of job satisfaction, and (3) emphasis placed upon various duties of chairmen were related to each of major chairmen roles.

METHODOLOGY

The seventy-four item questionnaire used in this study was a revised version of a similar questionnaire used in a pilot study. The major areas investigated included departmental organization and goals and biographical information, emphasis placed on job duties, and degree of job satisfaction of department chairmen. A total of 1,646 questionnaires were distributed to all department chairmen in thirty-two state universities, selected geographically, which awarded the Ph.D. degree and had enrollments between 9,000 and 21,000 in 1972. Completed questionnaires were received from 1,198 (73 percent) chairmen. Their responses were analyzed by correlational procedures, factor analysis, and content analysis. Correlational procedures were used primarily to relate the demandingness of tasks to their enjoyability, the amount of emphasis which "is" and "should be"

placed on selected departmental goals, and the degree of job satisfaction with professional opportunities as a chairman as opposed to a faculty member. Factor analysis was employed to determine major dimensions of departmental goals, chairmen's job satisfaction, and the relative emphasis placed on various duties performed by chairmen. Content analysis was used for the open-ended questions.

RESULTS

The dominant characteristics of the departments and chairmen are presented in Table 1. These results indicate that most departments have approximately fifteen to twenty faculty members and about one-half offered doctoral degrees. Virtually all respondents (94 percent) were males, with a median of fifteen years total academic experience and four years of experience as a chairman. Thus, most chairmen had about ten years of previous professional experience prior to becoming a chairman.

A review of the pattern of responses to the items in the questionnaire suggested that there are three primary roles which chairmen perform: academic, administrative, and leadership. The following discussion will focus on the departmental goals and chairmen's job satisfactions and duties which were found to be associated with each of these roles. It should be emphasized that these three roles are not mutually exclusive. That is, each chairman functions within each of the three role orientations to varying degrees.

The academic role. Two major types of departmental goals relate to the chairman's performance in his academic role. The first type of goal concerns "graduating a well-versed student with a balanced education" and "educating students for a future career." These goals were viewed as complimentary of each other, rather than detrimental, and there was considerable agreement that this is a highly important priority area. The second type of goal relates to

an emphasis on "producing new knowledge" and "having an outstanding graduate program." The amount of importance given this goal area is strongly related to the highest degree offered by the department, the number of departmental faculty, and the chairman's academic rank. Thus, the emphasis placed on this goal area appears commensurate with the departments' level of effort expended on research and graduate school activities.

The two major duties associated with the chairman's academic role might be described as student activities and graduate research activities. The time spent in performing duties associated with these duties varies: those chairmen who enjoy working with students or conducting research usually find the time to do so. On the average, these duties, especially teaching and advising students, emerge as among the most enjoyable reported from the list of 27 duties investigated. In terms of the time requirements of these duties, chairmen report they spend almost one-half of their time teaching, advising, or performing research (about twelve hours per week in "teaching and advising" and eight hours per week in research and professional development).

Chairmen tend to express frustration, however, when viewing their ability to perform these duties. They are most dissatisfied with opportunities for research activities and the lack of sufficient time for outside activities. They indicate that they would be much more satisfied with these opportunities as faculty members.

The administrative role. The goals related to the administrative role include "developing an efficient organization," "providing a service to other organizations," and "maintaining the goals and requirements of the central administration." The first two currently receive the least emphasis, but respondents say they should be emphasized more strongly. Maintaining central administration requirements is reported as the only one which is over-emphasized.

Not surprisingly, chairmen who perceive higher emphasis on administrative goals also report spending greater amounts of time in internal and liaison administrative duties. There appears to be two major types of duties associated with the chairman's administrative role. The first involves duties within the department: maintaining records, administering the budget, managing staff employees, and so on. The second type relates to the linkage of the department to other university organizations, primarily central administration. In performing these latter duties, the chairman acts as a liaison or conveyer of information to and from the department. The time spent on these duties seems to be perceived as beyond the control of the chairman, since there is essentially a zero relationship between reported enjoyability and required effort. In fact, the internal administrative duties included the three most distasteful tasks which chairmen report performing: maintenance of accurate student records, managing physical facilities and equipment, and preparing and presenting budgets. The linkage tasks are reported as somewhat more enjoyable but still disliked.

In terms of satisfaction with the administrative role, the chairmen like their opportunity to interact with others outside the department, but they also report that they would be equally satisfied in such associations as faculty members. In summary, acting as administrator is a required role, but is the one least preferred by respondents to this study. Chairmen recognize that administrative tasks must be accomplished, but it would appear that little enjoyment is derived from such activities.

The leadership role. In a list of four possible goals related to the leadership role, the goal of "maintaining a spirit of inquiry and academic freedom" was reported to be the most strongly emphasized. This variable is emphasized by chairmen slightly more than the goal of "graduating a well-versed student with a balanced education." Relationships between satisfactions and

goals in the leadership role are positive.

Two primary types of duties are associated with the chairman's performance of his leadership role. One is the provision of leadership for department faculty. In this role the chairman functions as a personnel specialist: selecting, supporting, developing, and motivating faculty members. The effort required to accomplish these tasks appears strongly related to the number of faculty in the department, but also seems to be independent of other factors such as the college in which the department is located or the highest degree offered. Leadership duties apparently are optional -- chairmen who enjoy them spend more time performing them -- a not surprising revelation. Leadership duties also involve one of the most enjoyable nonteaching duties (that of providing informal faculty leadership) and one of the least enjoyable (that of evaluating faculty performance).

Program development, another activity related to the leadership role, revolves around the ability to help a department obtain a high level of professional excellence. As might be expected, a positive relationship exists between the time spent on these duties and the perceived enjoyment received from them; that is, as amount of effort increases, reported enjoyment of the task also tends to increase.

Chairmen seemingly like the leadership role, because of the opportunity it offers to "help others," to "develop professional skills," to "have a challenging job," and to "influence the profession and college." While a majority of chairmen reported they like these opportunities, they acknowledge that such opportunities would be available if they were faculty members as well. The major reason respondents indicate that they are willing to continue as chairmen is the opportunity to guide the development of the department. In this role, chairmen perceive more opportunities for leadership and potential success than as teaching-research faculty members.

DISCUSSION

Based upon the above information about the roles and duties which chairmen are expected to perform and the level of satisfaction they derive from these activities, it is possible to identify at least three ways in which the effectiveness of the department chairman might be enhanced.

The first would be to give chairmen more autonomy and resources. This may be possible in a few cases, but it is a change frequently beyond the capability of deans or other administrators to whom chairmen report, and through whom these capabilities must flow to the chairmen.

A second approach would be to provide chairmen with greater administrative assistance to relieve them of some of the reported onerous administrative details. When departments are too small to justify an administrative assistant, grouping departments for administrative support purposes and assigning a professional administrative assistant to a group of departments might help. The assistant could oversee student records, budget preparation, data development for the college and central administration, and other administrative duties.

Another way to increase the effectiveness of chairmen would be to help them learn more about the nonacademic activities required of their position. With the exception of a few chairmen who have professional training in management or administration, chairmen typically lack technical management knowledge. The majority of respondents explicitly noted this problem and acknowledged a need for increased proficiency in performing the nonacademic roles.

Orientation for the activities chairmen perform might be directed toward three areas. The first is to familiarize chairmen with the rules, regulations, policies, procedures and the "big picture" at his university. While this is particularly true for chairmen recruited from outside the institution, it would also be useful for local faculty members who, upon selection as chairmen, must

be concerned with a much broader spectrum of responsibilities than before.

Another area for orientation would relate to the administrative activities expected of chairmen. This includes such tasks as developing and living within a budget, managing physical plant and equipment, assigning work responsibilities, and related duties.

A third area for orientation for chairmen would emphasize the leadership activities expected of them. Many chairmen reported that they would profit from increased proficiency in small group leadership and discussion techniques. Ways to increase motivation and to resolve conflicts were also mentioned as desired abilities. If these orientation procedures are effective, then other ideas received from the chairmen surveyed, reflecting the possible benefit of exposure to basic combat training in the Marine Corps, encounter groups, or experience in Judo or Karate, might not be needed.

TABLE I

Characteristics of Departments and Chairmen for Seven Types of Colleges

	Agric	A&S	Bus	Educ	Engr	H.Ec.	Medical
No. of department heads	162.	526.	76.	160.	115.	38.	33.
Percent males	99.4	96.8	100.	91.2	100.	36.3	97.0
Mean No. full time department faculty	17	17.1	13	15	13.4	12.6	14.8
Percent of departments offering the doctorate	69.1	51.7	50.0	63.5	70.8	24.3	83.8
Years served as chairman	7.2	4.9	6.8	5.7	7.7	6.9	7.8
Years served on faculty	18.9	16.1	16.0	15.5	17.6	15.5	17.2
Percent holding rank of professor	87.0	74.3	73.7	76.3	87.0	76.3	78.8
Percent appointed for a fixed term in office	23.9	54.2	27.6	25.9	32.2	31.6	24.2
Average length of fixed-term appointment	4.0	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.6	3.7	2.6